miss you in my bones

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by abbymyg

Summary

When Will found out Hannibal was the ripper, he immediately went to Jack.

He has regretted that decision for the rest of his life.

Notes

Thank you so much to marciamolitor13 for requesting this fic!

Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

Will doesn't frequent these types of events. He finds them distasteful. He doesn't understand how this archaic system still exists in the 21st century. It should be abolished. The only reason he attends this one is because of a case. He hasn't told Jack, but he's sure there'll be no risk. The security at these events is heavy, with guards at every possible entrance, not only to protect the attendants but also the *merchandise* being auctioned.

The suspect he's investigating today is a regular, for what he could find. A lot of upper-class people are. After all, auctions require you to have a certain amount of money to be able to bring something valuable home, and most of them have charitable purposes, which the bourgeoisie enjoy participating in as they believe it somehow makes them better people.

This auction in particular was advertised by the venue as being full of rare items of great value, so Will is sure that his suspect will be here this evening. He's the kind of man who wouldn't miss an opportunity to acquire something he can boast about to others.

The receptionist at the entrance eyes him up and down when he walks in. Will put on his best suit, hoping he managed to eliminate the layer of dust it had from not being worn for too long. Clearly, he didn't. Still, the woman smiles at him when she speaks.

"Welcome to The Veridian Orchid, sir, do you have a ticket or would you like to purchase one?"

"I have one," Will says, placing it on top of the desk.

"Excuse me," she says and grabs it to examine it. She makes sure that it's authentic before handing it back to him.

"I'll need to see your ID, please, is this your first time here?" she asks, just to be polite. Will knows she knows the answer.

"Yes," he says as he hands her his ID.

"Welcome sir, we're glad to have you here. You'll need to fill out this form and read the terms and conditions, then sign right at the bottom of the page where the 'x' is," she explains, giving him a pen. "We accept cash only. If something costs more than the money you are carrying, there is an ATM right this corner for convenience."

He isn't going to buy anything. "Awesome, thank you."

Will signs the document, and the receptionist gives him a bid paddle with the number 24. She checks that no part of the form was left unfilled and nods.

"All good," she says. "Just take the stairs or the elevator to the second floor, and it'll be the door to the right."

“Thank you,” Will nods to her as well and leaves.

The room is quite full already, with multiple people seated on the beautiful antique chairs, chatting. Everyone is dressed far more elegantly than him, and Will is worried that he will catch the other patrons' attention, but no one seems to care for him. He sits at the back of the room and scans it. He finds his suspect on the very front row, speaking to a woman in a long blue dress. He keeps his eyes on them as the room begins to fill.

The auction starts. Pieces of art, old vases, an antique Chinese tea set. Will doesn’t pay much attention to any of it, and neither does his subject. If Will is right, like most people here, he’s only interested in buying slaves. The thing that differentiates him from the rest, however, is what he does to them after buying them. He dissects them, takes their organs, and leaves them to rot.

Will is pretty sure he has the right guy when the slaves appear on stage and he bids for every single one of them. He wins four. When the host announces the final bidding of the night, Will isn’t paying attention to the stage, too focused on this guy. So when he opens his eyes and he sees *him* , Will gasps.

Hannibal.

A breath gets caught in his throat as recognition dawns upon him. The rest of the world, the other bidders, fades away, blur. It feels like time stops, and the lights of the stage illuminate his silhouette in golden colors.

He looks *awful* . He has a mask on, and his arms and legs are tied together tightly. There’s a white towel around his waist, and he’s made to kneel on the floor with his head facing the ground. From where he is seated, Will can see a burn scar on his back with some kind of symbol in the middle.

“I heard he killed his first master,” a woman says to another on the row in front of Will. “Then attempted to kill the second one.”

“Jesus, and they want us to bid for him?” the other shakes her head in disbelief.

Will doesn’t care. So many years regretting opening his mouth that day, so many nights he lay awake thinking of all of the could-have-been possibilities. He thought he would never see him again, and watching him being sold in this way, when he can sense his distress in the air, breaks his heart. He has to do something about it.

“The bidding will start at a thousand, ladies and gentlemen,” the host announces.

“Only a grand?” the woman from before says. “They *really* are desperate to get rid of him.”

“I would too if I were in their position.”

Will waits for the signal to start, and immediately raises his pallet when a thousand is called. Three other people join him, including his suspect, but it’s nothing compared to the demand the previous slaves had. He can win this.

He doesn't have to fight for long. As soon as the price goes to ten thousand, two of the patrons give up. Only he and the suspect remain.

"Fifteen thousand!" The host shouts. Will raises his pallet with no hesitation. The other guy waits a second too long to decide, and the host points at Will. "Sold for fifteen thousand!"

The drive home is awkward. Hannibal stays quiet the entire time, seated in the backseat of the car. He was given a "modesty blanket" by his handler, and he clings to it as if his life depended on it. It reminds Will of a rescued dog; the way some of them will tremble in fear, scared that their new owner will treat them just as badly as the last one. Will's chest constricts and his grip on the steering wheel tightens.

Hannibal watches the scenery outside as Will drives. Nothing changed from when he used to drive himself to and from Will's house, but all those memories are tainted now. Bittered by the taste of betrayal, resentment, and *fear* .

Fear is an emotion he doesn't allow himself to feel very often. It makes him helpless, reverts him to that time in his childhood where everything got taken from him during that cruel winter. Even when in the hands of his previous masters, he would lose himself for days inside his mind palace, dissociating to not feel anything. He didn't want to give them the satisfaction of seeing him broken.

But now? In the hands of the man who found out he was the Chesapeake Ripper, the man that brought him down? The man whose friends were killed by the ripper, whose purpose was to capture him, see him behind bars? Hannibal is scared of what he might do. He most definitely will seek revenge. Will's mind is exquisite, torture from him would be entirely different than his previous masters. Extreme acts of cruelty require a high degree of empathy, after all.

They arrive at the house and Hannibal considers escaping for a second. Some part of him is curious as to what Will will do, as he always was, but the most realistic, base part of him puts his survival as a top priority. He could just run to the forest and escape.

He discards the idea as quickly as it came. Not because he wants to stay, but because he knows that his body in its current state wouldn't be able to handle it. His body is not what it was, it's out of training and bruised in countless ways. One of his legs doesn't work as it used to.

So he allows Will to lead him inside. The dogs come running at him, but one click of Will's tongue has them quietly obeying him and leaving Hannibal alone. Will leaves them outside so they won't bother them.

"Alright, well, um." Will looks around, unsure of what to say. He grabs a chair. "Sit here, I'll take your mask off."

Hannibal blinks in surprise, not convinced that is actually what the man wants to do, but goes along with it for now.

Will gives him a small smile, then presses his lips together in concentration as he figures out how to undo the clasps and unbuckle the belts. Once he does, he leaves it on the table, then moves behind Hannibal. The man stiffens.

“It’s okay, I’ll just unbind your hands, that’s all,” Will explains.

He does as said, leaving the thick rope on the table beside the mask. He grimaces when he sees the marks it left around Hannibal’s wrists, his red skin. It looks like the rope managed to cut into his flesh a bit. Will isn’t sure how good of an idea it is to leave Hannibal alone, but he goes to the bathroom to get the first aid kit anyway. He retrieves an ointment and applies it to Hannibal's wrists. The man’s body once again tenses when he feels the cold touch on his skin, but he doesn’t move away.

“There you go, much better,” Will smiles. He leaves the ointment on the table.

“Why?” Hannibal says, speaking for the first time since Will removed his mask. His voice is rough, stranded as if he hadn’t spoken in a long time. It breaks Will’s heart to hear him like that, but at the same time, he’s glad he’s at least speaking to him.

“Why what?” Will asks.

“Why did you buy me?” Hannibal asks. “You finally gained enough courage to look me in the eye after skipping the trial, just so you could mock me further by buying me?”

He starts coughing afterward and Will has to resist every urge he has to hug him. Who knows how he’ll react after everything Will is sure he must have gone through. He’s not unfamiliar with how criminals sold as sexual slaves are treated.

“I do not wish to mock you, Hannibal,” Will says, shaking his head. “You have no idea how much I regret going to Jack’s office that day.”

Hannibal scoffs and rolls his eyes, turning to look at the wall on the other side.

“It’s true! I couldn’t sleep after I found out what you were, *who* you were past the person suit,” Will says. “Do you have any idea how betrayed I felt? My friend, the only *real* friend I thought I had, maybe even something more—” Hannibal looks at him at that, his eyes momentarily flashing “— had been killing half of the victims I was trying to get justice for, cutting them up into pieces and feeding them to me while discussing the case.”

Hannibal stays silent, but Will knows he’s listening to him.

“I felt seen by you, Hannibal, I felt like you were the only person in the world who could understand me, who knew me better than I knew myself,” he continues. “You were the only person who made me feel safe, who got a glimpse into my mind and didn’t run away or deem me crazy. And I felt like I knew you too, or like I was getting to know the real you. I was

starting to think that maybe the magnetic pull I felt towards you was more than just a simple friendly affection."

"You met the real me," Hannibal says, then licks at his lips. "And you ran."

Will closes his eyes and sighs.

"Yes, Hannibal, I ran," he admits, "of course I ran. I was scared. I was *terrified,* Hannibal, I didn't know what to do, I didn't know how to react. Did it make me a monster if I pretended I knew nothing about your *extracurriculars* and let you keep killing innocent people? Did it make me a monster if I betrayed you and told the FBI?" he says. "But what bothered me the most, Hannibal, the thing that got me awake the entire fucking night wasn't all that," he says. "Oh no, not at all." He shakes his head and lets out a sad laugh. "It was that I was scared to death of what wanting to join you meant. What loving you meant."

Hannibal's jaw drops and his fingers twitch. They want to reach for Will, but he resists the impulse.

"I've been struggling with where I stand in the morality line since I was a kid, all my childhood I fought against this fucking urge to hurt others, to rejoice in their pain. I fought and I thought I won until I met you and I killed Garret Jacob Hobbs. It felt good, I felt powerful, like all the voices in my head had finally gone silent for an instant. I was euphoric. You," he smiles at him, "made me feel like I wasn't insane for feeling that way. All my life I struggled to keep this buried deep inside me, but then I met you, and everything came out. I was not going to be able to push it down again, not for long. And then I found out you were The Chesapeake Ripper, and I wanted to surrender you because maybe if I did, I would be freed of all these thoughts and feelings too."

Will tastes salt on his tongue and his cheeks are wet by the end of his speech. He must have started crying at some point.

Hannibal opens his mouth to speak, but Will doesn't let him.

"I have no idea what you've gone through, I can imagine it, but I don't know, and I'm sorry, Hannibal, I'm so sorry," he says. "I've been regretting my decision since that day. I know I can't make it up to you. I know I won't be able to turn back time and just go to your house that morning instead of Jack's office, tell you that I know and I don't care. I know you must hate me, I understand, but the least I could do was to prevent you from falling into someone else's hands, someone that would do who-knows-what to you. You can hate me, stab a knife in me if that's what you want, kill me, torture me, whatever, but I want you to be free, Hannibal. I love you. You don't deserve this. You can leave if you want."

"Will, I…I…" Hannibal struggles to find something to say in response to all that.

Will smiles, understanding. "You don't have to decide now, it's alright, you can stay as long as you'd like. If there's anything you want, or need, you can ask, okay?" Will waits for Hannibal to nod, then nods himself. "Okay, good. I'll prepare some food."

He means to walk to the kitchen when a hand around his wrists stops him.

“Hannibal?”

The man’s cheeks are flushed a pretty shade of pink, and he is looking at the ground, with his hair covering his eyes.

“Can you run me a bath?” he asks in a barely audible whisper.

Will’s heart skips a beat. “Of course I can.”

Hannibal nods and lets go of his wrist. Will’s ground floor bathroom doesn’t have a bathtub so he goes upstairs. He turns the heating on and turns on the bathtub faucet so the tub begins to fill. He doesn’t have bath bombs or anything like that, but he does have a fancy lavender soap Alana gifted him and he never used. He unwraps it and leaves it at the side of the tub.

He fetches a towel from the closet and considers for a minute if he should get him something to wear, too. He has a shirt someone gave him a long time ago that he never wore because it was too big, but will probably fit Hannibal perfectly. He also has a pair of new boxers, but he doesn’t think any of his pants are big enough for him. For now, this will have to do. If he decides to stay, he can buy a new pair for him later.

He leaves them folded on the side of the lavatory and closes the door of the bathroom so the cold of the house doesn’t slip into it. He walks downstairs again, to find Hannibal at the table, right where he left him.

“It’s done, the bathroom is upstairs,” he tells him.

Hannibal nods and gets up from his chair. Will follows him as he makes his way to the stairs, not because he doesn’t trust him to find the room—is the only one besides the bedroom he doesn’t use—, but because he’s scared Hannibal’s body might be too weak. He realizes it was the right choice when his ankle gives out and he almost falls. Will grabs him by the hips to keep him upright.

“Easy now,” Will says, “is your ankle okay?” He doesn’t think he’s strong enough to carry Hannibal up the stairs without killing them both in the attempt, but he’s willing to try if the man can’t walk.

“I’m fine,” replies Hannibal, defensive.

Will doesn’t insist. “Okay, walk slowly, we’re not in a hurry.”

Hannibal nods and resumes walking. Will’s hands hover over his sides, ready to catch him again. Luckily, they get upstairs in one piece, and then head to the bathroom.

“Alright,” Will nods, feeling a bit awkward when they two walk in. “You can use my shampoo if you’d like, and I left you a towel and clean clothes over there.”

He makes to leave and close the door but, for the second time in the night, Hannibal stops him. His mouth opens and closes repeatedly, and he looks at the ground when he speaks.

“Stay,” he says simply, then adds, “ *please.* ”

There’s no way Will can say no to him, to the way those words are uttered, and to the look in his eyes. He looks as if he were asking Will for something impossible, for the stars or the moon, and Will wants to fucking murder every single *pig* that came in contact with Hannibal these past years. Make them suffer a destiny crueler than death, even. Whoever branded his back definitely deserves it. He hopes he’s the master that Hannibal killed. If not, Will is gonna make sure that they feel just as scared and humiliated as Hannibal did. All his ears can hear for a moment is white noise as his blood boils. He wants to yell, to scream, to cry.

He snaps himself out of it and looks at Hannibal. “Of course,” he replies.

He wonders if he should ask the question he’s dying to ask.

He’s worried about what Hannibal’s reaction will be, what after years of bad experiences and feeling betrayed by Will had done to his psyche. Yet Will doesn’t want to let the opportunity pass, they’ve lost so much time already. He doesn’t want to waste it further.

“Do you want me to bathe you?”

Hannibal doesn't reply at first while he's getting inside the tub, but Will waits for consent. The man looks a bit funny, his long limbs too big to fully fit inside. He has to bend his knees to be more comfortable.

“Please,” he nods after a few moments, closing his eyes.

Will smiles, and decides that beginning with his hair is the best course of action. He kneels next to the tub and grabs the bottle of shampoo. He pours some on his hands and rubs them together before applying it to Hannibal's hair. He threads his fingers through it slowly, making sure they don't get tangled so he doesn't hurt him by pulling. Hannibal is tense at first, Will can see it in the line of his shoulder and neck, but slowly, slowly, he relaxes.

The scent of the shampoo isn't too strong, with a slight vanilla aroma that reminds him of homemade cookies. He closes his eyes and tries to not think of anything other than the sensation of Will’s fingers on his head, the soft circles he traces on his scalp. It sends pleasant tingles down Hannibal's spine, and it makes him feel warm. **Safe** .

He hasn't felt that way in such a long time that his eyes fill with tears. It's overwhelming, and he craves more.

“I'm gonna rinse your hair now,” Will lets him know.

He grabs the handheld shower head and does as said, gently. He puts a hand on his forehead to prevent the water from getting into Hannibal’s eyes. It's such a simple gesture, yet Hannibal's heart flutters in his chest anyway.

“May I wash your back?” Will asks next. Hannibal hums in agreement and Will grabs the soap.

He lathers his back carefully, avoiding touching the large scar in the center. Now that he sees it up close, he can read the surname engraved on Hannibal’s skin. Verger. He touches the

edge of it with the pad of his finger, and at the mere contact, Hannibal hisses.

Oh, yes, it doesn't matter if this person is already dead, Will will fucking dig them out of their grave, find a way to revive them, then kill them again. He wants to sink his teeth into their flesh and tear them into pieces. They will beg him for forgiveness, and Will won't give it to them.

"Sorry," he apologizes to Hannibal, retrieving his hand immediately. "Is there anything I can use to clean the wound or do you prefer that I don't touch it?" he asks.

Hannibal licks his lips and considers the options for a moment before replying, "Later" with a shake of his head.

"Okay," Will nods. "I'll move to your front then."

He changes positions on the floor and leathers up Hannibal's chest. He can't ignore the amount of red and purple bruises that cover his skin there. On his back, he was too distracted by the big Verger brand to pay attention to anything else, but on the front the various bruises are unavoidable. He treats Hannibal as he would treat a wounded dog, with a feather-light touch but still tries to clean him up as well as possible. Now that he is in front of him, he can see the tears that drip down Hannibal's face.

Will's heart aches, wondering when it was the last time that someone ever took care of Hannibal this way. If there ever was a time. The Hannibal from the past would never have let Will do this, he thinks. He always had his guard up. He still does now, in a way. He's letting him do this, but tomorrow he might as well wake up with a knife to his throat. He can't be sure.

He's surprised how at peace he's with that. If that's what he'll have to deal with for the rest of his days to keep Hannibal at his side, he will.

Once he's done rinsing his entire body, Will wipes the tears off Hannibal's face and, in an impulse, deposits a soft kiss on his forehead. Their eyes meet and Hannibal looks at him with so much raw affection that Will gets choked up.

He gets up from the floor and brushes his pants."Come on," he struggles to say. He extends a hand to him. "Let's get you dressed up."

This time, Hannibal doesn't ask him for it but lets Will dry him with the towel. When Will deems him dry enough, he dresses him up.

They don't talk even as they leave the bathroom and go back downstairs. Will wanted to make something to eat for them, but it's late, and Hannibal looks exhausted.

"You can sleep here tonight, I'll go upstairs," Will says, pointing with his chin to the bed. There's probably too much dust in the upstairs room, and with Hannibal's fragile state, who knows how his immune system will react to it?

He pauses for a moment, but this time is he who asks. "Do you want me to stay with you?"

“Please,” Hannibal nods.

Will gets into the bed with him, slipping under the covers. Hannibal scoots close to him and hides his face in Will’s chest, and Will has to put all his strength in trying not to cry in relief.

“Will.”

“Yes?”

“Thank you.”

Oh, God. Will hugs him close.

“Of course,” he says. “You have nothing to worry about, Hannibal, not anymore. I won’t let anyone hurt you again.”

And if anyone even dares try, may god have mercy.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Thank you to marciamolitor13 for requesting this second part!

Enjoy!

Will wakes up with a start. It takes him a while to register why. It can't be that Hannibal moved because the man is still breathing soundly next to him, irradiating warmth against Will's body. Hannibal probably hasn't had such a long sleep in years, and Will doesn't want to move an inch. The man looks comfortable and peaceful, and Will wants him to stay that way as much as possible. Forever. So Will doesn't understand what woke him up.

His dogs are asleep in front of the fireplace, except Winston, who notices he is awake and raises his ears in interest. The wind is howling outside his window, but he doubts that's the cause. He's used to this type of weather. No animal is making sounds, nor is there a storm. None has pulled a car near the house—if they had, the dogs would be barking.

He frowns, wondering what it is, then, if nothing inside or outside is making noise. He doesn't recall having a nightmare, either.

Then his phone beeps.

Will clicks his tongue, worried that the sound might wake Hannibal up, and mutes the device as he looks at who texted him. *Jack*. And he has three previous texts from him too, so that must be what woke him.

He unlocks the phone to check them.

Will, are you awake? **[07:45]**

I want to talk about the ongoing case **[07:51]**

Are you home? **[07:51]**

I'll be there in 10 **[07:59]**

Will's heart sinks. "Oh, shit, shit, shit," he mutters to himself.

Fuck, he has to wake Hannibal up.

"Hannibal," he says, stroking his hair out of his face gently. He doesn't want to startle him. "Hannibal," he repeats, "wake up, Hannibal."

Hannibal blinks his eyes open slowly at the sound of Will's voice. "Master…?" he asks, not fully awake yet.

"No, just me," Will says, touching his arms. "We have to get up, Hannibal."

Hannibal takes in his surroundings, confused at first as if disbelieving he's in a warm place and comfortable bed. He rubs his eyes, remembering where he is and what happened the day before.

"Oh," he says, voice heavy with sleep, "are you hungry?"

Will chuckles. "What? No, I mean, don't worry, I'll make us something to eat. No, um, Jack texted me."

Hannibal's face changes at the mention of his name, expression turning sour. "Did you tell him about me?" he asks, but it sounds more of an accusation. He puts space between them, getting as far away from him as the bed allows.

"No! Of course not," Will shakes his head.

"Oh."

"No, he texted me that he wanted to discuss the case we're investigating, so he's coming to the house right now," he explains. "What do we do?" He bites his lower lip, thinking. "You can hide upstairs, there's no reason for him to go up there, or maybe the shed?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "We should play the roles of master and slave," he says.

"What?" Will frowns. "Why?"

Hannibal licks his lip. "How long do we have until he gets here?"

Will checks the time on his phone. "Eight minutes, more or less."

Hannibal nods. "I can hide upstairs if you prefer, but if I'll be staying with you—"

Will interrupts him. "You're going to stay?" he asks, unable to hide his happiness.

Hannibal ignores him. "—then Jack, or someone else, is bound to find out about my presence. It's better if he finds out now, when we can control the situation, than if he drops by unannounced and sees you treating me nicely," he explains. After a good night's rest, he seems to be closer to being the old Hannibal that Will knew. At least his ability to come up with ideas.

"Okay. What should we do?" Will asks.

Hannibal grabs the hem of his T-shirt and takes it off. He folds it carefully and hides it between the bed sheets. "Just act like a master would, Will," he says. "Relax, follow my lead."

Will looks at the bruises that adorn Hannibal's skin and winces. The mere idea of treating Hannibal like those disgusting pigs makes him dizzy, and his stomach churns. He doesn't want to do this. He looks at Hannibal absentmindedly as he takes off his underwear.

"Hannibal, I can't," he shakes his head.

"Will." He grabs his hands in his. "Use your empathy. Think about how Jack feels about me, and use that to fool him. He is in the belief that you feel the same way, correct?"

"I think so, yes," Will replies.

"Perfect. Chanel that." He lets go of his hands and hides his underwear between the sheets as well. "Do you have a spare dog collar?"

Will blinks. "Sorry?"

"I don't suppose you have a proper slave collar," he says. "I could wear the mask, but I'd rather avoid it if possible."

There's no way Will is letting him put the cannibal mask on again. He hates it. It hides too much of Hannibal's face and such an important part of what the man *is* that it makes Will's blood boil. He doesn't like seeing him like that.

"I should have one, hold on," he says.

He opens the drawer of his bureau dedicated to the dogs, and all of them get up at the action. They approach Will.

"No, no, we're not going on a walk," he says, sensing their wagging tails and excited panting behind his back. He rummages through the drawers, muttering to himself in a low voice. He finds three collars of different colors and lengths. "Here they are," he smiles. "I think the black ones might fit. Should we try them on?"

Without waiting for an answer, he approaches Hannibal and gets behind him. He's surprised Hannibal's neck doesn't have marks as his wrists or ankles have from being restrained. Not that he isn't glad, but he is curious about it. Collars are the most important, and also the most basic piece of a slave uniform. It's the way they're identified. Even if they don't wear anything else, slaves wear their collars. Hannibal didn't have one before, because of the way the mask was constructed, but all of the other ones at the auction did.

"Your previous master didn't give you a collar?" Will asks before he can stop himself. He tries to tie the one he's putting around Hannibal's neck but it doesn't fit. He discards it and grabs another one.

"He did," Hannibal replies. He swallows when Will's fingers brush his throat, and the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. "He decided a muzzle was a better idea a few weeks later."

Will can't keep the smile off his face when he asks, "You bit him?"

The thicker black collar fits. It has two metallic loops on the front to hook a leash on and a tag for the dog's name. It's brand new. Will bought it in case he ever rescued a bigger dog, but he never did. It frames Hannibal's throat beautifully. Black leather fits him well.

Hannibal turns around, smiling as well. "What do you think?

Will chuckles and Hannibal's grin grows bigger, for a moment forgetting about their predicament. It doesn't take long for Hannibal's expression to turn serious again, and touch his neck, feeling for the collar.

"Is it too tight?" Will asks.

"No." Hannibal slides one finger under it. "On the contrary, it's a bit loose," he says.

"Hannibal, I'll hurt you if I tighten it," Will argues.

"Don't worry about that, Will," Hannibal shakes his head and turns his back to him. "Do it."

Will sighs but does as he's asking. He unloops the collar and tightens it before adjusting the buckle. "Is that okay?"

"Yes, perfect," Hannibal nods.

It seems like the collar is digging into his skin, and Will purses his lips, suppressing the need to take it off. Hannibal's voice is normal, and he's not struggling to breathe. His pulse is steady beneath his fingertips. He forces himself to trust Hannibal's plan.

"Alright, but let me know if it's too uncomfortable," he says, "I don't give a fuck what Jack will think, just let me know, okay?"

"Okay," Hannibal nods, but Will can see in his eyes that he won't tell him anything. He sighs.

The dogs are barking now, angry that Will hasn't opened the door for them yet. Their owner unlocks the door and lets them out, ordering them to not go too far from the house.

"Anything else?"

"Mn," Hannibal thinks, "you could mark me, to be safe."

"Mark you?" Will raises an eyebrow.

"Yes, all these bruises are old, he'll notice that," he explains.

"Oh no, no-uh," Will shakes his head. "I won't hurt you."

"Will."

"No, Hannibal."

"A little bite won't hurt me, Will, I'll be fine."

“It might not, but I still don’t want to do it.”

Hannibal knows Will will not give in, so he has to let it go. He loathes to admit that the refusal, as detrimental as it might be for his plan, brings warmth to his limbs and causes his heart to beat faster. He is unaccustomed to being treated with such care.

“Well then,” Hannibal sighs. He checks the clock. They still have a few minutes. “You should get started on breakfast.”

Will’s breath hitches when he hears Jack’s car pull up at the house. He forces himself to keep his attention on the pan he’s busy scrambling eggs on, focusing on not burning them. Hannibal is kneeling on the floor with his head down, looking like an obedient dog that’s hoping their owner will accidentally drop a crumb onto the ground so he can eat. It upsets Will’s stomach and he wants to scream. He wants to grab Hannibal’s hand and drag him up, have him assist with the breakfast, and put on a cozy sweater. As much as the fire warms the place, the chilling cold of winter slips inside anyway. Hannibal must be freezing.

He hears footsteps approaching on top of the snow, walking to the porch and making the floorboards creak. He takes a deep breath and grips the handle of the pan in his hand with so much strength that his knuckles turn white. Hannibal must sense his nervousness, oozing from him in waves, because he places a reassuring hand on his leg and squeezes him lightly.

“It’ll be fine, Will,” he whispers, meeting his gaze.

Seeing how confident and sure he looks does help ease Will’s anxiety. He nods, licks his lips, and turns his eyes back to the pan just as Jack knocks on the front door.

“Come in, Jack, it’s open!” Will shouts. He grabs a spatula to serve the eggs. Hannibal remains unmoving at his feet.

The door groans open, and in walks Jack, dusting off snow from his arms. “Good morning, Will, it’s freezing today,” he says. “Where are you?” he adds when he doesn’t find him at the entrance.

“Back here, in the kitchen,” Will replies. “Do you want coffee?”

“Yes, thank you.” Jack approaches. “The toxicology results have come from—”

Will interrupts him. “Before that, there’s something more important I need to talk to you about, Jack.”

He can hear the frown in his voice when Jack says, “What could be more important than—” He stops in his tracks when he sees Hannibal. “What the fuck?” His jaw drops in surprise,

and he looks at Will, searching for an explanation. He searches in his belt, instinctively, for a gun that isn't there.

"I went to The Veridian Orchid last night," Will starts.

"You went *where* !?" Jack asks. "Will, you can't go investigate without my permission!" he complains, then shakes his head. "Wait, don't change the subject, what the hell is Hannibal fucking Lecter doing at your house!?"

Will quickly realizes that if he wants Jack to believe he's the one who's been hurting and leaving all those marks on Hannibal's body, he can't know that he only bought him last night. He changes the plan.

He sighs and rolls his eyes, pretending that the subject gravelly annoys him. "This *thing* came to my house one night a week ago," he improvises, letting out a dark chuckle and allowing a smirk to form on his lips. "He was desperate, seeking shelter after he escaped his previous master," he continues. "This pathetic thing thought that I would help him." He grabs his chin roughly and lifts his face to force him to look into his eyes.

Jack isn't convinced yet. "Why did he think you'd help him? That's ridiculous," he says, crossing his arms.

"Isn't it?" Will laughs, and it comes out so dark and cruel that he hates himself. He hates the pain he sees reflected in Hannibal's eyes even more, and he hopes to God that the man is just weirdly good at acting. He forces himself to continue. "His owner never came looking for him, and I've been taking really good care of him since. Haven't I, slave?" He tugs on his collar, making his choke, and forcing him closer to his crotch.

Hannibal doesn't speak, so Will slaps him. A bit harder than he intended. Fuck, fuck, fuck. He wants to punch himself for that, but there's no taking it back now.

"Answer me when I speak to you, slave," he says, gripping his chin again.

"Yes, master." Hannibal's voice is shaky and barely audible. He is trembling, his hands find it hard to stay still on top of his thighs. His eyes fill with tears and he looks away from Will's eyes after answering him.

"That's better," Will says and lets go.

Hannibal coughs and Will's chest hurts. He wants to hold him in his arms and tell him that he's sorry, but he can't. He'll just have to get rid of Jack as fast as possible.

"I'm impressed," Jack says, looking proud. "He's like a completely different person."

"Someone had to teach him what his place is," Will says, "his previous masters abandoned him because they didn't know how to handle him, he just needed someone that does." He smiles. "My empathy is useful for more than solving cases."

Jack smiles back at him. "You have done a good job with him, Will," he praises. "He looks thoroughly broken," he adds, examining his bruises. "Used and treated the way human trash

like him deserve. Not an ounce of respect or care for criminals like this who killed dozens." He tilts his head as he looks at the brand on his back. "What's up with that?" he points at it.

"The previous owner of this house used to have cattle," Will lies. "There's a bunch of old equipment at the barn. I kept it in case it came in handy one day." He grins. "It did."

He moves to the coffee machine and pours the coffee into two mugs. He can't look him in the eye when he lies. Jack knows him too well. Also, he hopes it distracts him from checking the brand too closely. It has a surname on it, and he can't risk Jack recognizing it.

"Marking him for the slaughter. Treating him the way he used to treat others," Jack nods. "Very clever, Will."

"Thanks."

"I might drop by one day to *take care of him* ," he says with a sinister smile that sends shivers down Will's spine. "There are some things I'd like to make him pay for." He says, undoubtedly thinking about the trainee Hannibal killed. Miriam Lass.

"Sure," Will fakes agreement. He hands Jack his coffee mug, and takes a sip from his own, burning his tongue in the process. "So, what did you want to discuss?" He motions to the living room to move there.

They begin walking and Hannibal follows them. Jack stops and turns to look at him, frowning.

"Your master didn't tell you you could move," he says. "It seems that he still needs to be taught a lesson," he tells Will.

Hannibal stops and looks at Will. He seems afraid, and Will wants to kill Jack. He sinks the nails of his free hand on his palm and burns his fingers with the ceramic of the mug to distract himself from the urge.

"Yes, he does," Will says through gritted teeth. He doesn't care if Jack realizes something is wrong, he can't keep this act up for much longer. "I'll deal with him later. Go back to the kitchen, slave, you know you can't move without my permission. And you better be kneeling right on the same spot you were before when I come back, or I'll have to punish you."

Hannibal drops his head and turns around to return to the kitchen. It reminds Will so much of a disappointed dog dropping his ears, with his tail between his legs, that it makes Will's heart ache. He has to fight very hard with himself not to go after Hannibal.

"Sorry, where were we?" He closes the door and asks Jack instead.

Jack drives away and Will can finally breathe properly. He turns back into the house and goes —runs—to the kitchen.

“I’m so sorry about all that, Hannibal,” he says as he approaches. “I didn’t know what to—” he opens the door and gasps.

Hannibal is kneeling on the floor still, right where Will told him he should be when he returned. He’s looking at the floor, with his hands in fists on top of his thighs. There are red marks on his skin that were not there before. Scratches. Will can even see some blood blooming from one of them.

“Hannibal?” he calls. An icy chill runs through him.

He reaches to touch his shoulder, uncertain if he should. Even a flinch from Hannibal will make him cry, he knows.

Hannibal doesn’t flinch. He doesn’t react at all.

That’s worse.

That’s so much worse.

Will kneels down in front of him, and Hannibal doesn’t even lift his head to look at him. His fingers move, nails sinking on his thighs again. He tries to avoid his touch when Will grabs his wrist to stop him.

“Don’t,” Will asks, with a tone of voice as gentle but firm as he can manage. “Hannibal, please.” He grabs his hand in his, threading their fingers so he can’t scratch at his skin.

He places his other hand on his cheek and moves his head softly, raising it to so their eyes can meet.

Hannibal is crying.

He’s been doing so for a while if the redness of his eyes and the wetness of his skin are anything to go by.

“What is it, Hannibal?” he asks, “what happened?”

There is no reply. Hannibal avoids his gaze and stares at the ground.

Will, for once in his life, is grateful to have pure empathy. Even without it, he thinks he would have been able to read the pain and disappointment on Hannibal’s face. Maybe someone who didn’t know him wouldn’t be able to, but he can. He sees the regret Hannibal has for proposing this plan, and how *angry* he is at himself for feeling so bad after acting the way he told Will to act.

Will can tell him that he’s at fault for underestimating the effects so many years of being a slave to abusive masters had on his mind. He can’t tell him he is wrong for believing himself

to be unchanged from the person he usually was, for believing he is as strong and impenetrable as then. For believing he has no emotions.

They will eventually have to talk about it. He can't get him a psychiatrist—not an ethical one, at least. Slaves are not allowed to see them, the goal of such a sentence is for them to suffer so it would be counterproductive. Will's knowledge of psychology will have to do.

Either way, those things are not important right now. Right now, what Will has to do is comfort him and tell him everything will be alright.

"Hannibal, listen to me," Will says, tracing circles on his cheek. "I hated every word that was coming out of my mouth too, and I'll gladly kill Jack with my bare hands and serve his heart on a platter for you to eat for the way he was talking to you," he declares. "And I'm so, so sorry I slapped you. I didn't measure my force."

He examines the skin under his hand, but he can't tell if the pink color of his cheek comes from the shame and the crying, or if it's a result of physical force. Regardless of that, he moves his hand away.

"Here, wait a moment, I'll get you ice," he says, letting go of the other hand he was holding to get up.

He only has to take a few steps to the fridge to grab a cold compress from the freezer. He wraps it in a dish towel and crouches down again in front of Hannibal.

"Here you go." He hands it to him.

It takes him a few seconds, but Hannibal finally grabs it and presses it against his bruised face. "Thanks," he mutters.

Will smiles, glad he's at least speaking to him again. "It's nothing," he says. "And, again, I'm sorry. I will never refer to you as a thing or hurt you in any way ever again," he promises. "And I would rather die than let Jack lay a finger on you. Not him, not anyone."

Some of the tension dissipates from Hannibal's body, so Will wraps his arms around him, half-expecting Hannibal to push him away. Instead, the man leans onto him, hiding his face on Will's neck and holding him back. Will smiles and strokes his hair.

"You're mine, Hannibal," he whispers in his ear. "I won't let anyone touch you."

Hannibal's response is to hum and hold him tighter.

After a few moments, they separate, but Will continues to massage the hair at the nape of her neck. Will smiles at him, and Hannibal offers him a weak but sincere smile in response.

"Are you feeling better?" asks Will.

"Yes," Hannibal responds, and Will can tell he's sincere. "I'm sorry for reacting that way."

“No, none of that,” Will shakes his head. “You’re allowed to have feelings, Hannibal. Don’t ever apologize for that.”

Hannibal could cry again. Instead, he kisses him. Will is caught off guard by it, and it takes him a second to respond. When he does, Hannibal melts into the kiss, pressing his lips more firmly against Will’s. Will feels warmth spread from his chest to his fingertips, and down to his toes. He lets Hannibal lead, not wanting to rush him or do anything he isn’t prepared for. Hannibal pushes closer, running his tongue along Will’s bottom lip. It’s tentative, careful, but the feel of Hannibal’s tongue sends fire through his veins. He parts his lips to allow him inside, and Hannibal immediately slips his tongue past his lips and into his mouth. They explore each other’s mouths, moving in tandem.

When they pull away to breathe, Hannibal looks at Will with shining eyes and a flushed face. Will doesn’t have a mirror nearby, but he’s sure he’s sporting a pretty similar expression, if not the exact same.

“I love you,” he reminds him.

Hannibal smiles, not ready to say it back yet, but deposits a chaste kiss against his lips.

“Come on,” Will says, offering him his hand. “Let’s disinfect those scratches and get you dressed.”

Hannibal grabs his hand and follows him.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> Hi! Thank you so much again to marciamolitor13 for requesting this third part and epilogue!
>
> Please check out the updated tags. Enjoy!

Hannibal's days at Wolf Trap are simple and peaceful. Will never lets him go to sleep without a good night kiss—except the few times he's gone out of state for work, in which case he always calls to tell him he misses him and wishes him goodnight. Hannibal wakes up warm on the bed in front of the fire and cooks breakfast for them both before Will goes to work—saying goodbye with a kiss as well. He spends time with the dogs, reads, and sketches. He prepares food for the dogs and takes them on walks around the property. He's happy.

In the past, he never would have considered adopting a pet, let alone seven of them. but as his mind and his body recover from the years of abuse, he appreciates their company. They're always there for him, wagging their tails and asking for pets, demanding attention and offering kisses.

Will is patient with him. He never tires of reassuring him when he has nightmares, saying sorry when he triggers a reaction accidentally, and at the same time, never makes him feel useless.

The first time Hannibal cooked for them—the first time he cooked in literal *years* —, he ended up burning himself on accident. It brought him back to the moment his previous master branded him, and he couldn't touch the kitchen for a while after it. Again, Will was patient with him, always there to remind him that he *is* capable of doing stuff. He just has to believe it, forgive himself when he doesn't succeed, and try, try again.

Hannibal is so thankful that destiny brought them together for a second time. This time, he'll do everything in his power for things to end up well.

Spring is coming, and the dogs are enjoying the melting snow and the mud, playing around and getting dirty. A towel lies at Hannibal's side, ready to clean their paws before they go back inside. Buster approaches him, wagging his tail and holding a bright blue ball between his teeth. He drops it at Hannibal's feet, where he's seated on the steps of the porch.

"You want me to throw the ball for you?" Hannibal asks.

Buster barks.

"Yeah?"

Buster barks again.

Hannibal laughs. He takes the ball from the floor and throws it in the direction of the forest. The little energetic Jack Russell dashes after it. Hannibal watches him go with a smile on his face. Nearby, Max and Harley are playing, pulling both ends of a twig. Jack is sniffing at the ground. Ellie, Winston, and Zoe are just lying down close to him, enjoying the slightly warmer weather. Hannibal watches them, wondering if Will will be back from work soon. He texted him a while ago saying he was delayed by a case, so Hannibal's not sure when Will will be free.

Hannibal sighs and decides to get his sketchbook in the meantime. Will got it for him a couple of weeks after Hannibal came to the house, as well as some pencils and brushes. Hannibal cried when he received the gift. That's why he's been drawing the dogs lately. It'll make a cute thank-you gift for Will's birthday in a couple of months.

Hannibal goes inside the house to grab it and sits on the porch again. Buster comes at him running and drops the ball at his feet. He pets the little dog, grabs the ball, and throws it.

He starts drawing, and he is so immersed in what he's doing, that he doesn't hear the car engine until it's too late.

He looks up and the car isn't Will's blue Volvo.

It's a black sedan with polarized windows. The kind that the FBI uses.

Could it be Jack?

The man steps out of the car and Hannibal confirms his suspicion.

Oh no.

Oh no, no, no.

He gets up hastily, in an attempt to sneak back into the house, but it's already too late. Jack saw him, and he's walking in his direction. Fast.

"Oh no, you're not going anywhere, slave," Jack shouts.

His angry, raised tone of voice sends shivers down Hannibal's spine, but Hannibal forces himself to ignore the voice in his head telling him to stay in his place unless he is willing to face the consequences. It's a learned defensive reaction that he's been trying his best to unlearn. Now it's the best opportunity to put it into practice. He takes a deep breath, gets rid of the imaginary roots tying his feet to the floor, and runs.

He manages to get to the door, but years of abuse have weakened his body. He's nowhere near in the same shape as he was a decade ago. Jack is much faster than he is, and he feels him breathing behind him before he puts a hand on his shoulder.

"What the hell do you think you're doing!?" Jack accuses. "Playing with the dogs as if you were a free man."

He pushes Hannibal to the floor, then pulls him hard by the ankle, making him fall from the stairs of the porch. Pained moans follow Hannibal's gasp of surprise as his body hits the hard wood, bruising his arms, legs, hips, back, and chest. He remembers to protect his head, but there's nothing he can do about the rest of his body. He lands painfully on his knees on the ground.

Winston approaches him, worried, and nudges his hand to lick his palm.

Hannibal smiles, endeared at the dog's actions. "It's okay," he reassures him in a whisper, even as his voice is breaking. "It's okay, go play with the others." He's terrified that Jack will attack the dogs if they try to defend him.

"Answer me, slave," Jack says, ignoring Winston. He wraps a hand around Hannibal's neck to force him to look him in the eyes, uncaring if he hurts him. "What the hell do you think you're doing?"

Hannibal doesn't answer.

"What are you doing, huh?" he repeats. "You should be inside the house, restrained and locked, unable to move. Unable to do so much as to breathe. If you were my slave, you'd be handcuffed all day. I'd treat you worse than a dog. Nothing more than a punching bag and a hole."

Hannibal doesn't answer him with words, but he spits on his face.

Jack cleans it with disgust, and his grip tightens. "I see Will isn't being hard enough on you, slave. You still haven't learned your lesson," he says. "Well, I'll have to teach you myself."

He uses his other hand to raise Hannibal's sweater. Hannibal doesn't let him and kicks him to push him away. If he manages to run away, get inside, and lock the doors, Jack won't be able to get in unless he breaks something. He isn't sure how willing the man is to break a window on his friend's property. He'll justify himself, perhaps, telling Will that he had to do it because the slave was misbehaving, but at least it'll put some distance between them and buy Hannibal a couple of seconds to grab a knife or something to defend himself with. He misses his scalpel.

Jack catches him before Hannibal can do that, this time making him fall face-first onto the ground. Jack climbs on top of him, locking his legs with his own to prevent him from running away or kicking him again. He rests an arm on his back so Hannibal can't get up and pulls at his hair with his free hand. Hannibal groans in pain, his head rising against his will. Jack chuckles right against his ear.

"You really thought you could get away," he mocks. "Stupid, stupid slave," he says. "You need to learn your place."

Will sighs when he finally gets in his car. He takes off his dirty gloves and rubs at his eyes. The crime scene was gruesome, even more than usual, and he can feel a migraine building. He pops an aspirin from the container he carries everywhere and downs it with some water. He checks his phone, but there are no important notifications. Hannibal hasn't texted him after their last conversation, and he has no messages from Jack either. He writes to Hannibal, letting him know that he's coming home now, and throws the phone onto the empty passenger seat.

That reminds him, he should text Jack about the crime scene, but he can't bother right now. He'll leave it for tomorrow morning or, knowing Jack, he'll call to ask about it later in the evening, way past Will's working hours.

Will sighs again, turns on the engine, and drives.

The first red flag is that, after half an hour of driving, he hasn't heard his phone beep. Hannibal always answers his texts quickly after receiving them. Maybe Will accidentally didn't hit send, or Hannibal is outside with the dogs and he left his phone inside the house. Nothing too worrisome yet.

The second red flag is the tracks near his house where the snow is thicker, left by car wheels. Now he's beginning to worry.

The third red flag is the fact that Will doesn't have nearby neighbors. The closest one is an old lady who doesn't own a car, and her kids and grandkids only visit her on the weekends. So unless something happened to her or there's some kind of family event, there's no way those tracks are of a family member's car.

The fourth and last one is that his coworkers were all at the crime scene, and his father had never visited him since he moved to Wolf Trap. It'd be very unlikely for him to start doing so now.

So that only leaves one person who could show up at his house unannounced.

Jack.

Hannibal is alone at the house.

FUCK.

He accelerates the car and drives to the house at full speed.

He sees the man's car parked in front of it and practically jumps off his car.

Shit, shit, shit.

It takes him a moment to find them, but he sees Jack on top of Hannibal on the floor, right in front of the porch stairs, trying to undress him.

Will's central nervous system doesn't finish processing the information, but his instincts kick in. He sees red. Everything else fades into the background. He can't see anything, can't hear anything but Hannibal's sobs and pleas as he attempts to push Jack off him.

He can't think. He can't control himself.

He can feel the rational part of his brain wanting to fight against his impulse, but the anger won't listen to reason.

It takes over.

He runs and throws himself on top of Jack. One moment he's holding him and trying to pull him away from Hannibal, the next one he has both of his hands around his throat. He feels Jack's fast pulse under his fingertips, the sweat on his skin. Jack doesn't have time to react. He can't even let out a sound before Will makes sure that he'll never, *ever* , be able to utter a word again.

He twists his neck.

A cracking sound is heard, and the man stops moving. His eyes are open, staring unseeing into the sky. Will can see the realization in them, his eyes frozen exactly on the moment he figured out that he was tricked by Hannibal and him. The life leaves his pupils quickly, and he falls, unmoving, against Will's body.

Will lets him fall to the ground. He's shocked about what he just did, but he doesn't have time to focus on that for now. He has another priority.

"Hannibal!" he screams, helping the man to sit up and checking his body for wounds.

There's a mark on his face where Jack slapped him, and purpling bruises from being pinched very roughly at the sides of his body. Some other marks also turn all sorts of yellow and purple with an unknown origin. His skin which was *finally* starting to heal is bruised again, and Will wants to revive Jack and kill him all over again in a much more gruesome, bloody, and violent manner.

"Hannibal, are you okay?" he asks. Will knows that physically he's not, but he's more worried about his mental state, as he isn't replying. "Hannibal?" he insists.

"Y-you killed him," Hannibal says after a moment, looking at Jack's body on the ground with his jaw hanging open

"Yes, that's not important right now," Will says, shaking his head. He grabs Hannibal's shoulders to bring his attention back to him. "What did he do to you?"

"You killed him," Hannibal repeats, unable to take his eyes off Jack. "You killed him to defend me?" he asks as if the concept of Will doing such a thing for him is impossible to fathom.

"Yes," Will confirms. "Of course. I promised I wouldn't let anyone, especially Jack, hurt you again," he reminds him. "I'm just sorry I didn't arrive sooner to be able to prevent it."

Hannibal's mouth opens and closes repeatedly but no words come out of his throat. As much as Will reassured him that he would do anything and everything it takes to protect him, it hasn't fully registered with him to the lengths he would willingly go to do so. That Will would allow the part of himself that he tried with all his might to keep repressed and hidden from the world for years to come out for Hannibal's sake has him overwhelmed with emotions.

He wants to relish in Will's kill, to celebrate and honor it, but at the same time, his eyes fill with water and his heart with so much affection for the other man that it might burst. He wants to kiss him on the lips, thank him, and tell him how much he loves him. He wants to reassure him that everything will be okay after killing Jack, as Will did with him when he first saved him.

So that's exactly what he does.

He kisses Will. He frowns when he tastes mud. It takes him a moment to realize it comes from his own lips and face from when Jack pushed him face-first onto the ground. Will doesn't seem to care, though, because he kisses back. One hand strokes his cheek, while the other one his nape, in those soothing circles that Will loves to trace on his body. His warm skin feels comforting against Hannibal's cold frame. It helps wash away the sadness and the pain.

"I love you," Hannibal mutters against his lips when they part. "I love you."

Will makes a choked sound, surprised. He stares at him in awe before chuckling and hugging him, kissing his cheek.

"I love you too, Hannibal," he whispers into his ear. "So, so much."

Hannibal giggles, but it comes out as more of a sob. He cries from pure happiness. From pure relief and thankfulness. He doesn't know what he did to deserve Will.

"Thank you," he says as he weeps. "Thank you."

"You don't have anything to thank me for," Will says, letting go of the hug to dry Hannibal's tears with his sleeve. "I did promise I would kill him with my bare hands and deliver his heart on a platter if he touched you, didn't I?"

Hannibal chuckles, and it makes Will smile in return. He examines his face, and his bruised cheek, and his expression switches to anger again.

"I'm just sorry I didn't kill him sooner," he laments. "I should have done that the first time he came."

"Nothing some ice and analgesics can't fix, I didn't break anything," Hannibal says, trying to lighten up the situation. "It's not your fault, Will. You did great."

Will shakes his head and sighs. "Can you walk on your own?"

Hannibal gets up, holding onto Will's hand. He takes a few steps and, even though his hips and legs hurt, he can walk. "Yes."

"Okay, go inside, I'll take Jack's body to the freezers in the shed before someone else decides to drop by unannounced," Will says, rolling his eyes.

After that, Will runs a warm bath for Hannibal to clean off the mud that is attached to his skin. He applies cream and ice to his wounds with care. They do most of it in peaceful silence, but Will's mind has been loud with thoughts since he entered the house.

Finally, while he's drying Hannibal's hair with a towel, he decides to voice them.

"We should run away," he declares.

Hannibal, who is seated between his legs on the floor, twists his neck to look up at him. He waits for Will to expand on that thought.

"I mean, someone will find out about Jack's disappearance eventually. If not in a day, then in two. They'll find out you're here with me too. How long can we pretend?" he explains. "Sooner or later someone will realize I don't treat you like a slave, like Jack did. I don't want you to be hurt anymore."

Hannibal stays silent for a moment. Will can almost hear the gears turning in his mind.

"There's a property the FBI didn't find out about when they arrested me," he confesses. "There should be a safe there with new fake identities and passports ready. Cash as well. We can go anywhere you'd like."

Will laughs. He shouldn't be surprised that Hannibal has those kinds of resources.

"Let's go somewhere *you'd* like, Hannibal," Will says. "I wouldn't know what to choose, and you deserve a nice vacation after everything you have gone through."

Hannibal smiles and drags Will downwards to kiss him. "I always wanted to show you Italy. Florence. The city that watched me grow and become a man"

"Florence it is, then," Will smiles back.

"We'll have to get an apartment big enough to fit seven dogs," Hannibal considers, looking at the animals peacefully sleeping on their beds.

Will laughs and kisses him again.

Later at night, they have dinner and go to bed. Will waits for Hannibal to fall asleep before he sneaks out of the bed, and then out of the house. He drives Jack's car into a lake to make the FBI's search harder, then returns home, but doesn't head inside yet. Instead, he goes to the shed.

After spending quite an embarrassingly long time there, he finishes what he wanted to do and goes to the house..

Hannibal wakes up to the sound of the shower. The space next to him on the mattress is cold, so he wonders how long Will has been awake. Not thinking much of it, he gets up from the bed intending to prepare their breakfast.

He freezes when he sees what's on top of the dining table.

There, arranged as if they were flowers, are Jack's hands, surrounded by pieces of flesh that he isn't sure which body part they came from. It could be the legs or the arms; Will's cuts are too messy to tell. But he doesn't care. To Hannibal, this bouquet is the most beautiful thing he's ever seen. Jack's hands are holding a pristine white porcelain plate. His heart rests in the middle of it.

Hannibal's eyes water.

"Oh, Hannibal, you found my gift," Will says. Hannibal turns to find him grinning at him from where he's leaning against the door frame of the bathroom. "Do you happen to know how to cook a human heart?"

Hannibal smiles so wide it hurts, and the tears begin to fall. "Of course I do."

Chapter 4

6 years later…

Alana is taking a well-deserved vacation with her wife and son in Italy. She loves her job, but the last few years have been rough, especially after Jack's death and Will's disappearance. It's taken a toll on her mental health and made things much more tense and difficult at the bureau. She still has her teaching job at the university, but even that became hard after all that she has gone through

A part of her still believes in the good of Will's heart and thinks he isn't the one who murdered Jack. There isn't proof to indicate so, and Jack and Will were close, as far as she knows. Yet her heart is convinced that they must be linked. At first, she thought whoever killed Jack got Will too, but with time she lost hope of ever finding out who the perpetrator was. Will's body was never found, and maybe it'll never be.

She met Margot one night at a bar when she felt hopeless and lonely, and they have been inseparable since. She's grateful for her. She makes her happy. Their son, as well.

Still, Alana is someone who enjoys her alone time. These past few weeks she has acquired the habit of taking morning walks while Margot and Morgan sleep, taking in the beautiful sights Italy has to offer.

She enjoys her Saturday and Sunday morning outings the most, as the street farm market takes place. She loves to browse the stalls and get some fresh produce to prepare her wife and kid breakfast. The market is lively, always filled with people and families examining the variety of products.

She's at a fruit stand, considering whether she should buy Vignola cherries or Amarena cherries, when someone's voice catches her attention. It sounds so much like Will Graham that she looks up immediately, following the direction the sound came from.

She gasps and almost drops her bags when she sees him.

Will is here.

He looks older. His hair is longer and he's grown a bit of a beard, but his blue eyes and brown curls are impossible to mistake. He's speaking with a guy in Italian, asking something about the fish he's selling.

She wants to approach him. She has a million things she wants to ask him. But her legs feel heavy and she can't bring herself to move. She realizes it's for the better when another man walks up to Will, holding a paper bag with bread. He wears a wedding ring on his fourth finger.

Hannibal.

Hannibal Lecter.

He’s here with Will.

“Oh my god,” Alana mutters to herself.

Will smiles at Hannibal when he arrives, says something to him, and points at the fish. Alana notices a ring on his finger too, identical to Hannibal’s. She can’t look at herself in a mirror right now, but she knows she must have gone pale.

As if sensing her presence, Will’s eyes meet hers. He smiles when he realizes who he’s looking at, but it doesn’t reach his eyes,

A shiver runs down Alana’s spine, and her nervous system finally reacts.

She runs.

She sneaks into a side street at the first opportunity and runs further down the empty road some more. She turns around and, when she sees they haven’t followed her, she leans against the wall to recover her breathing. She closes her eyes for a moment, thanking a god she doesn’t believe in.

All of her hope crushes, though, when she opens them.

She intended to resume walking, head back to the apartment they rent with their family, and tell them they should pack their things and run away. She won’t make it.

A figure appeared in front of her out of nowhere, startling her, before she could leave.

“Will.”

The man smirks in a wicked way that causes her to get goosebumps.

“Hello, Alana.”

End Notes

Merry Christmas Eve to those who celebrate and thank you so much for reading! If you enjoy this fic (and maybe would like to request a fic of your own), you can follow me here

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